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Chapter One ~ A New Leader Rises

[image]

Bluestar sat atop Highrock, watching her Clan. Spottedleaf was carrying herbs across to the medicine cat's den, her bright yellow eyes shining in the sunlight. Dappletail and One-eye were sharing tongues outside the elder's den, sheltered in the shade. Bluestar felt proud at how far her Clan had come since she began her rule as leader. ThunderClan had not lost a single battle except for Sunningrocks.

She winced as she remembered how badly wounded her warriors had been. She'd lifted her head to StarClan and prayed that Oakheart was not fatally wounded in the battle. Now, Bluestar closed her eyes and allowed the memory of Oakheart's fur against hers as they sat atop one of the Great Oaks at Fourtrees to take over for a moment. *Oh, my beloved. How I miss you.* Shaking the memory away, she turned and retreated to her den, where she slept, her dreams filled with a reddish-brown tom who was once her whole world.

A paw prodding her side roused her some time later. "Bluestar!" She groggily opened her eyes to see her deputy, Redtail, standing in front of her. She yawned, stretched and shook herself before sitting with her tail wrapped neatly around her paws. "Yes, Redtail?"

"There's news from RiverClan," he began. Immediately, Bluestar's heart lurched. *Please, StarClan, be merciful.*

"Crookedstar is dead."

Shock shot through Bluestar like a lightning bolt. "What? When?" The light-coloured tabby had changed a lot since she first met him as a young apprentice. Since their first fight at Sunningrocks all those moons ago, he had become a powerful warrior; as had she.

"Three days ago, from greencough," Redtail replied, his tail swishing from side to side. "Oakheart went to receive his leader name the same night." He tilted his head to one side. "We haven't gone to formally welcome him as a leader yet."

Bluestar's fur was on end. Her mind spun at the thought of her former mate now not only being a rival warrior, but a rival leader. *What am I going to do? What if ThunderClan and RiverClan have to fight? I can't go against him!* She added to herself sadly, *I never have.*

"Bluestar?" Redtail prompted. Bluestar snapped back to reality and shook her fur. "I think we should wait a few days," she replied, trying to keep her voice steady.

Redtail seemed surprised. "Why?"

Bluestar shook her head, not knowing what to say. "There's plenty of time."

"But when?" Redtail pressed. Bluestar wanted to yowl at him to keep his jaws shut, but she held her tongue. "In two days, after the first patrols have gone out." *Hopefully, there won't be as many RiverClan warriors to watch the spectacle.*

Redtail stared at her a few seconds, his tail tip flicking, before he dipped his head. "Okay."

"Find some warriors who will be willing to come with us." Getting to her paws, she gracefully strolled to the entrance of her den. "Watch over the camp while I'm gone."

"Where are you going?" Redtail asked.

Bluestar looked back. "To the ravine." She didn't wait a second longer. Dashing out of the camp, she raced through the undergrowth, leaves and branches whipping her pelt as she ran, chest heaving with every shuddering breath she took. Not slowing her pace, she leapt up the ravine, not even noticing she'd raced past it and was instead heading to a whole different place.

When Bluestar skidded to a halt, legs trembling from overexertion, she realised she'd come to Fourtrees. For a few moments, she only

stood, staring at one of the four Great Oaks. The same one she and Oakheart had climbed. *Oak*star, *now*, she reminded herself. It felt uncomfortable to be calling him by his new name. None of this seemed real yet. As she padded over the edge and down into the hollow, she thought she detected a scent amongst the earthy scents of the forest. Bristling, she opened her jaws and pricked her ears, straining for any sign of another cat. Had Redtail followed her?

A deep, achingly familiar mew startled her, pulling her out of her trance.

"You came here too?"

Bluestar whirled, and set her eyes on the new RiverClan leader himself. Her throat instantly locked up at the sight of his reddish-brown fur, the intensity of his amber eyes. She'd left camp to try and figure out how she was going to handle having to see Oakstar again at such close quarters, surrounded by their warriors who would most certainly be watching their every move, and now, here he was right in front of her.

She swallowed, and managed to croak, "I . . ." Oakstar stared at her, expectant. "I want you to know I never forgot you, Oakstar." She winced at the sound of his new name.

Oakstar's gaze was soft and full of affection. Pain tore through Bluestar's heart as the tom murmured, "Nor I you."

They stared at each other for a few more heartbeats before Bluestar finally gave way to the inner desire she'd kept inside her for so long, and, pelting towards him, she rubbed her head against his shoulder. She felt Oakstar relaxing, responding to her touch; pulling back and rubbing his head against hers. A purr rumbled in Bluestar's chest, and she heard Oakstar purring too.

Oakstar moved his head so their noses touched. "I've missed you so much, Bluestar," he whispered.

"I've missed you, too," Bluestar confessed. His scent brought memoriessurging back and Bluestar's heart twisted. She still understood that their love could never be, and she knew deep inside

her that he did, too.

Oakstar suddenly pulled away from Bluestar. The happiness that was bubbling in Bluestar's chest evaporated like mist as Oakstar sat in front of her with his tail curled around his paws. He must have seen the pain in her eyes, because he looked apologetic. "Sorry, Bluestar," he said, dipping his head to her. "It's just . . . we're in broad daylight. Anyone could be watching us."

Bluestar realised he was right, and felt incredibly stupid for being so foolish. Stupid turned to sad as she whispered, "You said once that if they couldn't see us here, they couldn't see us anywhere."

Oakstar nodded, his gaze becoming distant. "So I did." Clearing his throat, he looked at her.

"It doesn't feel right to be calling you Oakstar," she confessed. "I've always known you as Oakheart."

"You'll always be Bluefur to me," Oakstar breathed, and Bluestar shook her head, mind whirling. "No," she gasped. "It's too soon for statements like that."

Oakstar looked hurt for a moment, Bluestar knew she couldn't stay there any longer, otherwise her heart was going to burst out of her chest. "Oakstar, I have to go." She turned away from him, not wanting to look back. "Bluestar, no! Not yet!" Oakstar bounded forward and stood in front of her. "I can't bear to have you leave me again," he whispered.

"It's like I said," Bluestar said, meeting his gaze evenly. "If we keep meeting like this, we'll only end up being hurt. And look what's happening right now."

Oakstar stared into her eyes as he repeated the statement that had once made her heart lurch all those moons ago: "The only thing that can hurt me is being apart from you." Bluestar stared into his eyes a moment longer before hardening herself once more. "I'll be coming with a patrol to your camp in two days to formally welcome you as leader."

Oakstar blinked. "I'll be waiting," he promised.

As Bluestar started padding up the slope, Oakstar called, "I love you, Bluefur."

Bluestar stopped at Oakstar's bold declaration. And not only that, he used her old name. A mixture of affection and pain filled her chest, and she whispered back, "I love you too, Oakheart." Then she ran away, wanting to get as far away from this nightmare as possible. That little meeting had only made her feelings for Oakstar stronger than ever before.

After she'd rolled in ferns to cover Oakstar's scent, she'd padded through camp, ignoring Redtail's questions, and curled up in her nest with her back to the outside world.

This wasn't going to be easy.

Chapter Two ~ Unsettled

a/n: Hey guys! Sorry this chapter took so long! I had writer's block for a while and didn't know what to write, but I think this story is finally going to have some direction! Also, just a note; each chapter will alternate between Bluestar and Oakstar's pov's. This may vary sometimes, but that's generally going to be the structure. Anyway, hope you guys enjoy this chapter! :)

Oakstar watched as Bluestar raced up the slope, leaving him behind. Again. He sighed, closing his eyes. Their romance had never been as easy as he'd wanted it to be. He still couldn't understand why she'd given him their kits all those moons ago, in the depths of one of the worst blizzards the forest had ever suffered. Mistyfoot and Stonefur had grown into fine warriors, loyal only to RiverClan.

Completely unlike their father.

He quickly padded through the forest through his territory, contemplating their conversation. They had not spoken for many, many moons, and yet, it seemed that their feelings were still just as strong as they had been before. He rolled in some ferns to cover up Bluestar's scent. No cat should know what he had done.

As he entered the camp, his deputy, Leopardfur, came bounding across the camp, tail bristling. Alarmed, Oakstar padded forward. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Where have you been?" she demanded. "You just left the camp without telling any cat! You can't -" She broke off as Oakstar bushed out his tail and drew his lips back in the beginnings of a snarl. "Do not forget your place in this Clan, Leopardfur." He held his head

high. "I made you deputy because I believed you and I would be able to work together to lead our Clan well, not to be challenged. Do you understand?"

Oakstar could see the hairs on Leopardfur's pelt still bristling, but she nodded curtly. "The patrols returned a few moments ago," she told him, gesturing to the fresh-kill pile, which was covered in fish. Oakstar felt pleased. "Is all well on the borders?" he asked.

"There haven't been any reports of trespassing or prey-stealing, so I'm assuming yes," Leopardfur replied. "Should we send out more this afternoon?"

Oakstar paused, thinking. Would ThunderClan patrols be going out in the afternoon? *What am I thinking?* Shaking himself, he replied, "Yes, of course. Make sure to choose cats who didn't go this morning."

Leopardfur nodded and started to pad away, beckoning with her tail for him to follow her. They halted beside the warriors' den. "According to some of our cats, the den's roof has been damaged," she told him.

Oakstar was barely listening; his thoughts were filled with his reunion with Bluestar.

"Oakstar?"

He jumped and shook himself before looking at his deputy, forcing his fur to lie flat. "Yes, um . . ."

Leopardfur sighed, and, rolling her eyes, she repeated what she'd said. Oakstar nodded, trying to regain control. *I can't let myself be distracted from my Clan!* "Get some of the warriors to rebuild it," he told her.

Leopardfur nodded, tail weaving. "Okay. Should they start now?"

Oakstar shrugged. "As soon as you can, I suppose." As his deputy began moving towards some warriors who were basking on the rock, Oakstar called, "And, Leopardfur?"

His deputy turned her head, amber eyes expectant.

"We need to talk. Meet me in my den once you're done sorting out the patrols and the den leakage."

Leopardfur's eyes narrowed slightly, head tilted. He knew she was inwardly questioning his reasons. After a few heartbeats, she nodded. "Alright, Oakstar," she mewed cooly. He watched as she moved to the middle of the camp, calling for the warriors to join her.

As he watched his warriors gather, he suddenly began to feel shaky. His legs trembled and his breathing became quick and shallow. *Why am I feeling like this?* He continued watching for a few more heartbeats when suddenly he couldn't take it anymore. He raced to his den, pushing past the reed fronds until he was submerged in the darkness of the cave. He stood there, tail weaving from side to side, desperately trying to calm himself down. "Come on," he whispered to himself. "Why are you feeling like this?"

Was it that he was a traitor, and had been ever since he fell in love with Bluefur - no, Blue*star* now, he reminded himself? No, that wasn't it. He knew that wasn't it. There was something else. He padded across to the entrance of his den, staring out at the camp when he suddenly realised: his breath was coming quickly because he knew he would have to see Bluestar again in two days. He was shaking because they would be in front of their warriors; their warriors who would be watching their every move... What if he held her gaze for too long? What if her presence sparked those bittersweet memories of that one night they had together? They couldn't give themselves away.

How was he going to do this? How could he ever be a rival leader to his former mate? He quickly realised his stupidity in calling Leopardfur to meet with him. He'd only done so because he had no idea how to handle this new situation that had presented itself to him. "You're the RiverClan leader," he reminded himself. "You can do this."

"Oakstar?"

He jumped at Leopardfur's voice. He turned his head to look at her.

"You wanted to see me?" she pressed.

Forcing his fur to lie flat, he turned and settled himself, curling his tail around his paws. Clearing his throat, he spoke calmly, hiding his panic. "It's okay, Leopardfur." Rising to his paws, he padded over. "Have the afternoon patrols gone out yet?"

There was that questioning look in her eyes again. They narrowed as she studied his face. "Are you alright, Oakstar?"

"Answer my question," Oakstar snapped. He flinched at the tone of his voice; he hadn't meant to snap at her. "Sorry, Leopardfur... I'm just not feeling well."

"Do you want to see Mudfur?"

"No!" He inwardly cursed at himself. Why couldn't he sound normal? "No. I'll be fine."

Leopardfur sighed. "If you say so. And as for the afternoon patrols, I've sent out all of them except for one."

"Alright," Oakstar mewed. "Tell the patrol I'll be joining them."

Surprise etched across her features. "Are you sure? Leaders don't normally accompany border patrols. Besides, it can easily be done without you."

"I'm sure." Oakstar's mew was steady as he looked down at his deputy. He only held her gaze for a moment before returning it to the entrance of his den. "Let's go."

Together, they pushed out of the den and began heading towards the warriors that made up the patrol. Blackclaw, Shadepelt and Heavystep talked together, heads bent close.

The patrol looked up as Leopardfur and Oakstar approached. "Oakstar will be joining you," Leopardfur mewed. Looking to him, she added, "You lead the patrol." With that, the unusually spotted golden tabby she-cat turned and left.

Oakstar watched her for a few heartbeats, then turned to his patrol. "We'll patrol along the WindClan border," he mewed. Without another word, he began moving towards the camp entrance, his patrol following behind.

As they moved through the territory, Oakstar found the bubbling of the river both soothed him and gave him the confidence he needed. He lifted his head high as he led the patrol through the foliage.

When they came to the border, Blackclaw began setting markers, nose wrinkled in disgust. "I've always hated the stench of WindClan cats," he muttered. Oakstar waited for him to finish before continuing along the border. Each cat's ears were pricked as they moved, listening and watching for any sign of trespassing cats.

As they continued moving, Oakstar thought it strange that they hadn't come across a WindClan patrol yet.

"We haven't seen any patrols from WindClan," Shadepelt noted, unknowingly echoing Oakstar's thoughts. Bending to scent the border, he added, "Their scent is stale, too."

"Maybe, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't strengthen our side," Oakstar mewed.

Blackclaw's lips curled back into a snarl. "Let them smell us. Let them know how strong we are." He turned to face the border, his voice rising to a yowl. "You're all minnow-hearts!"

"Blackclaw!" Oakstar glared at the smoky black tom. "You don't just go yowling threats to other Clans! What if -"

A sharp nudge to his flank stopped him mid-speech. "Oakstar," Heavystep whispered.

He turned to face the tabby. "What is it?" he asked, keeping his voice low.

"WindClan cats," Heavystep hissed, tail waving in the direction of the bridge. "The wind carried their scent from that direction."

"Trespassers," Oakstar growled. He exhaled sharply before mewing,

"Keep close to me. No cat moves to confront them until we're sure they're across the border. Understand?"

His cats nodded, tails weaving and hackles rising.

"Alright. Let's go." Oakstar ducked his head down and began moving through the undergrowth. His patrol's paws thrummed against the ground as they ran, determined to catch the WindClan cats in the act.

As they came closer, Oakstar raised his tail for the patrol to slow. "We don't want them to know we're here," he murmured. *If they* are *here.*

Keeping his body low, he moved forward, the patrol following behind. Peering through the reed fronds, he growled. There *were* WindClan cats, all of them milling around the RiverClan side of the river. As he continued watching, Blackclaw growled, "Prey-stealers!" Oakstar's gaze flitted from cat to cat, searching for the familiar shine of a fish. Then, he saw it: a silver fish dangling from one of the cats' jaws. Oakstar looked at the face of the cat: the WindClan deputy, Deadfoot.

"How dare they take our fish?!" Blackclaw glared at the WindClan cats, then at Oakstar. "Oakstar, why aren't we attacking? They've stolen our prey!"

"Wait," Oakstar murmured. His gaze was narrowed as Deadfoot placed the fish down in front of his patrol. Deadfoot's mew floated across to where the RiverClan cats crouched. "Here. A nice, plump, fish."

Mudclaw made a gagging sound. "Deadfoot, do we have to eat this?"

"There's no prey on our territory," Deadfoot growled. "The Twolegs are doing something to the rabbits. This is the only way we'll get food."

A light grey tabby she-cat met Deadfoot's gaze. "But warriors aren't meant to hunt for themselves," she mewed. "Prey is meant to be

taken back to the camp for the elders and -"

"I don't want to hear it!" Deadfoot stalked over to the she-cat, rising up to his full height. "We're the warriors. *We're* the ones who need to be strong to hunt!"

"How long are you going to sit there and wait?" Blackclaw hissed. As Tornear looked around nervously, Oakstar growled, "I've seen enough." He let out a yowl as he leaped forward, his patrol leaping behind. The WindClan cats looked up, startled, as the RiverClan warriors landed and moved forward as one, fur bushed out and lips drawn back into snarls.

"What are you doing on our territory?" Oakstar growled.

Deadfoot stared at Oakstar cooly. "Hunting for fish," he replied.

Oakstar stepped forward, drawing himself up to his full height, eyes glinting in the sunlight. "You have no right to hunt on RiverClan territory," he growled, slowly unsheathing his claws.

"Oh, I think we do," Deadfoot mewed, padding across to Oakstar. The black tom's eyes were narrowed as he shoved his muzzle forward until their noses almost touched. WindClan scent wreathed around Oakstar as Deadfoot growled, "You can't control us. Besides... RiverClan is nowhere near as strong as WindClan."

Oakstar shook with rage. How dare the WindClan deputy lead his patrol onto RiverClan land? How dare he talk to a leader like this? *We'll teach them a lesson they'll never forget.* Bunching his muscles to leap forward, Oakstar screeched, "Attack!"

The RiverClan cats surged forward, screeching a battle cry. Yowling in fury, Oakstar leaped on top of Deadfoot, biting down on his neck. The WindClan deputy let out a squall of shock, rearing to throw him off. Oakstar dug his claws into the WindClan cat's shoulders, letting himself fall onto his back. Pulling Deadfoot on top of him, he battered at his belly with his hind paws. Deadfoot yowled in pain, black fur flying out. The scent of blood filled Oakstar's nose. Suddenly, Deadfoot raised his forepaw and lashed at Oakstar's head. Oakstar immediately stopped battering at Deadfoot's belly, baring

his teeth. Before he could counter-attack, another blow came from the other side. Oakstar yowled in pain as Deadfoot rained blow after blow on Oakstar's head, ribbons of blood flowing into his eyes. The WindClan deputy snickered. "Not so strong now, are you?"

Oakstar's teeth were bared with a snarl of fury. *I won't go down like this!* Screeching, he flipped them over so he was on top of Deadfoot. It was only moments before the two toms were locked in a screeching tangle of fur and claws. Suddenly, Oakstar was underneath Deadfoot again. This time, he didn't wait for the WindClan warrior to attack him. He lunged for Deadfoot's throat, but the black tom dodged. Then Oakstar threw Deadfoot off him, staggering to his paws. Deadfoot did, too, and for a few heartbeats the two stood glaring at each other, chests heaving, growls rumbling in their throats. Then Oakstar hissed, whipping around to face his next opponent.

Oakstar surveyed the battle: Tornear and Heavystep were locked in a screeching tangle of fur and claws. Blackclaw chased the light grey tabby she-cat around the bridge, tail streaming out behind him. Just beyond Oakstar, Shadepelt was struggling to dislodge Webfoot's teeth from her shoulder. As she scrabbled desperately, she screeched in pain.

Racing forward with a screech, Oakstar leapt on Webfoot, tearing him away from Shadepelt, rolling them over until the tom was underneath him. He began raking at Webfoot's belly with his hind paws, Webfoot letting out shrieks of pain. Oakstar suddenly threw Webfoot away from him, signalling to Shadepelt with his tail. As Webfoot staggered to his paws, Oakstar and Shadepelt raced towards him. They split up, racing on either side of the WindClan cat. As Webfoot leaped forward to meet them, Oakstar dived beneath his belly. Just as he'd hoped, Webfoot landed just beyond him, where Shadepelt raked at his flanks. Oakstar got up, racing to the front of Webfoot, rising up on his hind paws and raking at Webfoot's face while Shadepelt nipped at his flanks. Webfoot screeched, tore himself away from them, and raced away.

"Good job!" Oakstar panted. Shadepelt was looking to where the other cats were. "I think the battle's over," she mewed. Looking over, Oakstar could see the two rival Clans in lines opposite one

another, blood dripping from their wounds; tails lashing; growls rumbling in their throats.

"Come on," Oakstar murmured to her. He and Shadepelt joined the rest of their patrol, glaring at the WindClan cats. "You trespassed on RiverClan territory and stole prey," Oakstar mewed. Lifting his chin, he continued, "If we catch your patrols again, there will be severe consequences." He glared. "Now go!"

The WindClan cats turned, tails still lashing. They hissed at the RiverClan cats as they left. Before Deadfoot crossed the border to WindClan, he turned and stared straight at Oakstar, eyes narrowed. "This isn't over," he spat. Then, he turned and vanished.

Blackclaw let out a caterwaul of victory. "Minnow-hearts!" he screeched.

Oakstar nodded in approval of his warriors. "Well done," he mewed. "You showed WindClan that we do not show mercy to trespassers. I am proud of your efforts today." His cats purred, eyes gleaming.

"And we were proud to fight alongside you," Shadepelt mewed. The other cats nodded and meowed in agreement.

Oakstar nodded to her, a purr rumbling in his throat. They had won. "Let's go home," he mewed.

Chapter 3 ~ Blur

[image]

The next two days went by in a blur.

It was like Bluestar was in a trance - she never really saw or heard or thought properly. Clan life continued to go on around her, but she was stuck in one moment - the first time she properly saw Oakstar.

She'd been out on patrol with Sunstar, Lionheart, One-eye, and Swiftbreeze, which caught some RiverClan warriors sunning themselves on Sunningrocks. Lionheart had yowled a challenge, and Oakstar had come to investigate. He'd padded slowly along the scent markers, glancing at the patrol through the trees. Bluestar had hissed at him. She remembered how she was drawn into his gaze as his eyes gleamed; how his whiskers twitched as she called him a furball. She had no idea that one day, they would fall in love. She didn't know why her brain chose to go back to that moment - maybe because it was the beginning of their story.

The patrols hunted and scouted, she gave announcements and orders, but she never really lived through any of it.

On the third day, Bluestar was finally jolted back to reality. Waking up that morning was like opening her eyes for the first time - everything looked sharper and brighter than usual. *Maybe because I'm going to see him today.* She groomed herself thoroughly - she didn't want RiverClan's warriors to think ThunderClan's leader was unkempt. Despite that, there was also a cloud of dread hanging over her head. A cloud that whispered to her, *If you show any sign of affection; any sign of a relationship, all of your avoidance will have gone to waste. Everyone will find out the truth about you, and Mistyfoot*

and Stonefur. She and Oakstar had never spoken to one another since the day she gave him their kits, fearing that some cat might make the connection between Bluestar's lost kits and two strays arriving in RiverClan. But now they had. A sudden jolt of fear coursed through her body. What if some cat had seen them meeting at Fourtrees?

"Bluestar?"

Bluestar's head snapped up, eyes wide. She forced herself to relax as she saw Redtail standing at the entrance to her den. *Great StarClan, what's wrong with me?* "Yes?"

"The warriors are in the clearing. They're waiting for you to choose who will accompany you to formally welcome Oakstar as leader."

Bluestar gave a brisk nod and rose to her paws. "Let them know I'll come and choose now."

Redtail nodded, turned, and bounded down the rocks. As Bluestar moved towards the entrance of her den, her legs began shaking slightly. This was important - she needed to choose carefully, because not only would RiverClan's warriors judge her for her choice, Oakstar would, too. If she brought strong warriors, would they think she was preparing for a fight? If she brought warriors who were less likely to pick a fight, would they think ThunderClan was weak?

She moved carefully down the rocks, the feeling of dread in her stomach growing stronger and stronger; seeming to weigh down her every step as she moved from her den to the clearing. The ThunderClan warriors patiently waited as she came to a halt in front of them. "Today, I will take a patrol to formally welcome Oakstar as leader," she announced. Hopefully her voice didn't sound shaky. As she slowly moved her gaze across the cats sitting in front of her, her mind suddenly went back to that fateful patrol.

And she had an idea. A possibly stupid idea, but an idea nonetheless.

"Lionheart and One-eye." Eyes widened and clamours of protest rose

from the cats gathered in front of her as she said the last warrior's name.

"B-Bluestar!"

"Did I just hear you right?"

"You can't ask an elder to join you on a patrol!"

Amongst the clamour of tails and voices, Bluestar stood strong, head raised high. She raised her tail for silence, looking towards the elders who were sitting just outside their den. Shock was etched into One-eye's features. As the she-cat's eyes met, Bluestar desperately tried to communicate to her that she didn't just want her on this patrol - she *needed* her. After a few heartbeats, One-eye conceded, nodding and rising to her paws. "I'll go," she rasped. As the elderly she-cat padded across the clearing; wincing with every step, the warriors watched in shocked silence. Lionheart warily padded forward. His expression clearly told Bluestar he was confused and shocked, too. Despite this, Bluestar patiently waited for One-eye to join them. Once she had, Bluestar turned to her Clan and called, "We will be back soon," before turning to Lionheart. "Help One-eye through the forest if she needs," she told him softly. Letting out a breath she didn't know she was holding, the four cats began moving towards the camp entrance.

The journey to the border that separated the two Clan's territories was, as expected, longer than usual. None of the cats spoke as they walked through the forest. Lionheart stayed closed to One-eye, making sure she didn't stumble or fall on the way. Bluestar could sense the pale golden tom was confused and annoyed at her, but she didn't mind, so long as the patrol could be the same as it was all those moons ago. Even though two of the members were long-dead, and another an elder.

As they reached and settled themselves at the RiverClan border to wait for a passing patrol, Lionheart hissed quietly, "Bluestar!" She turned her head to look at the tom. He stayed seated between the she-cats, but his fur bristled. "This... is quite possibly the worst way imaginable to formally welcome Oakstar!" Leaning closer to her, he hissed, "You've brought an *elder* with you! What's that going to say

to RiverClan?"

"RiverClan will say what they like." Bluestar kept her gaze fixed on the enemy Clan's territory, not even realising that the trance was returning as her mind filled with memories of sound and colour and light.

She was jolted back to reality when a scoff filled her ears. "What is this?"

A RiverClan border patrol consisting of Blackclaw, Loudbelly, and Heavypaw strolled up to the ThunderClan cats. Blackclaw's gaze moved over the patrol slowly, lingering the longest on One-eye. Bluestar raised her head defiantly, staring at the enemy warrior. "We are here to welcome Oakstar as leader," she mewed.

Mrrows of laughter rose from the RiverClan cats. Bluestar felt Lionheart stiffen beside her, chest rumbling with a growl. "Alright, alright," Blackclaw mewed, his voice still gurgling with amusement. "We'll take you to Oakstar."

"What was that?" One-eye mewed. "I'm a little hard of hearing these days."

Blackclaw dared to step over the border and leaned close to One-eye's ear. *No doubt his fishy breath will repulse her*, Bluestar thought, suppressing a *mrrow* of amusement.

"We're going to take you to formally welcome Oakstar," he mewed into it.

"Well, that is why we came, isn't it?" One-eye rasped. Blackclaw's eyes widened and he stepped back as the elderly she-cat rose to her paws. "Now if I were you, I'd get off our territory before Bluestar lets poor Lionheart over here claw you to shreds."

Blackclaw's narrowed gaze swung to the broad-shouldered tom, whose fur was bristling; lips drawn back in a snarl. Lionheart took one threatening step forward towards the RiverClan tom, who instinctively shrunk and moved backwards onto his own land. Realisation came into Blackclaw's eyes, and he immediately rose up,

ears twitching in embarrassment. "We'll take you to Oakstar now," he muttered. His gaze sharpened as he looked to Loudbelly and Heavypaw. "Stay on either side of them."

As the six cats began to move through RiverClan territory, Loudbelly moved to Lionheart's side, while Heavypaw watched One-eye. Bluestar walked behind Blackclaw. As they moved through the territory, she couldn't help remembering when Oakstar had made her pretend she had a thorn in her paw so they could talk.

The night that followed was the best one of her life.

Before she knew it, they were approaching the entrance to the RiverClan camp. Everything became sharp and clear; her breathing became fast. She remembered why she was here. Bluestar realised she should never have asked One-eye to join her on the patrol. She was an elder; much too old to accompany a patrol. Plus, it was disrespectful. It was like she was back to the leader she used to be: young, strong, and capable. *Why did I do that? Have I gone mad?*

"One-eye." As she spoke, the cats stopped. The elderly cat turned to face her leader expectantly. Bluestar met her Clanmate's eyes. She remembered despite her handicap, it had never deterred her from being a warrior ThunderClan could be proud of. She remembered how she'd kept the older she-cat company while a patrol had gone to take Sunningrocks from RiverClan, and in turn, the older cat had comforted her in the wake of Snowfur's death and guided her in the days she was Mistyfoot and Stonefur's mother. She realised in a way, they had somehow been close over the course of their lives - and asking her to accompany her on the way to welcome her former mate was wrong. "You may go back to camp. I was wrong to bring you."

"She's here now," Blackclaw growled. "We're almost at the RiverClan camp, anyway. She can rest there." With that, the tom turned and continued leading the patrol. Shame clawed at Bluestar, but as the patrol neared the entrance to RiverClan's camp, she immediately pushed the feelings away and made herself look like the leader she knew she was.

As the patrol entered the RiverClan camp, heads turned and

whispers sounded in Bluestar's ears. She anxiously began scanning the camp for Oakstar, but he was nowhere that she could see.

The RiverClan deputy, Leopardfur, padded over to the patrol. She looked at Blackclaw and asked, "What is the meaning of this?"

"Apparently, ThunderClan's leader has brought a *pathetic* patrol to formally welcome Oakstar as leader," Blackclaw mewed, glancing at the ThunderClan cats scornfully.

"That's enough."

Bluestar jumped at the sound of Oakstar's voice. *Where did he come from?*

The RiverClan leader stood commandingly, eyes narrowed at the black tom. "Go join the other warriors." Leopardfur flicked her tail, and the RiverClan cats trailed away. Oakstar watched them go. "Now," he mewed, turning his brilliant amber gaze to Bluestar, "let us continue."

Us. That word sent shivers running through Bluestar's body. They hadn't been 'us' for many, many moons. She could feel herself beginning to drown in his eyes; allowing her love for him to take over. *No.* She straightened up, trying to lessen the trembling in her legs, and said, "Welcome, Oakstar. I hope you are able to lead your Clan for many prosperous moons to come."

Oakstar closed his eyes for a brief moment as he nodded. They opened again as he replied, "Thank you. I hope so, too."

A scoff came from one of the warriors watching. Bluestar's gaze rested on Blackclaw as he mewed sarcastically, "ThunderClan's warriors must be *so strong* if she had to bring an elder to accompany her."

Another chimed in, "ThunderClan doesn't have any strong warriors, remember?" *Mrrows* of amusement rose from the RiverClan warriors. Bluestar's gaze whipped to the side as Lionheart moved forward to stand alongside her. "Say that again!" he snarled as he bared his teeth and dug his claws into the ground.

"Lionheart," Bluestar warned quietly, but her attention was caught by Blackclaw gracefully rising to his paws, a challenge in his eyes. "It's true. ThunderClan warriors are weak. Why else wouldn't you have tried to take back Sunningrocks from us?" He paused, glancing at his audience, before leaning his head forward and hissing triumphantly, "Because you know you'll never win. Never!"

"That's *enough!*" Oakstar roared, but not before Lionheart had crossed the camp and leapt on top of Blackclaw, scattering the warriors sitting around him. Bluestar watched in shock as the toms tussled, rolling into the middle of the camp. The two toms sprang apart for a moment before Lionheart turned onto his side, slipping under Blackclaw's belly and raking it with his claws before turning on all fours. Lionheart reared up on his hind legs, ready to crush his weight on the RiverClan tom, but Blackclaw immediately rolled towards the tom's back legs, unbalancing him. Lionheart fell onto his back. As Blackclaw moved to pin him down, the golden tom rolled out of the way, swiftly getting to his paws before leaping at Blackclaw with a screech. The black tom reared up onto his hind paws and slashed at Lionheart's face. In the few moments Lionheart was blinded, Blackclaw knocked him to the ground, pinning him down and raking his belly. Lionheart screeched in pain.

Bluestar could watch no more. "Stop!" She darted across to the two toms, Oakstar on her heels. Oakstar hauled Blackclaw off Lionheart, who groaned and rolled to his side. The RiverClan leader dragged Blackclaw across the ground by his scruff. Oakstar's eyes were filled with rage. "How dare you provoke an enemy warrior on a peaceful patrol!"

Bluestar was just as mad with Lionheart. "You attacked a warrior on a peaceful patrol!" Leaning closer to the golden tom, she hissed in his ear, "What's that going to say to RiverClan?"

Lionheart's voice was husky. "You can't control your warriors."

"Exactly." Stepping back, she turned to Oakstar. "I apologise for this," she mewed. "He will be reprimanded accordingly."

"The same goes to you," Oakstar replied. Bluestar watched as the tom padded closer to her. She was surprised by the hostility in his

eyes. "Despite that, I think it's time you get off my territory."

Bluestar couldn't move for a few moments. Was Oakstar angry at her for what had happened? Was he just putting on a show for their warriors to see? She couldn't think of an answer, and she knew she didn't have time to think it over there. She dipped her head respectfully. "As you wish," she mewed pleasantly.

"Leopardfur will guide you to the border." The RiverClan deputy padded forward, dipped her head to Oakstar, and flicked her tail before guiding the ThunderClan warriors out of the camp.

Bluestar leaned close to Lionheart. "Can you walk? You'll need to get Spottedleaf to check your wounds once we get back."

Lionheart grunted. "I'm fine," he mewed. Bluestar didn't miss the pain in the tom's eyes, and she instinctively moved closer to him, allowing him to lean on her shoulder. He didn't protest. Meanwhile, Leopardfur helped One-eye through the forest. As they reached the border, Bluestar asked, "Would it be okay if you came with us to the camp? I can't help Lionheart and One-eye at the same time."

Leopardfur looked surprised at her request, but nodded. "I'm sure Oakstar won't mind."

It wasn't long before they reached the ThunderClan camp. Bluestar helped Lionheart across to the medicine den while Leopardfur helped One-eye to the elders' tree. Spottedleaf met Bluestar and Lionheart halfway. "What happened!?" she meowed, eyes widening with alarm as she saw Lionheart's injuries.

Bluestar mewed, "While we were in the RiverClan camp, Blackclaw provoked Lionheart to the point where he attacked him." Glancing at the tom, she added, "Blackclaw put up quite a fight."

Spottedleaf flicked her tail. "Come and I'll take a look at you." As the cats were about to go, Bluestar mewed, "Lionheart." The tom looked at her wearily. "Don't do that again," she mewed. He swallowed and nodded before turning to follow Spottedleaf. Bluestar turned her attention to Leopardfur, who was padding across the ThunderClan camp towards her. The warriors were

giving her suspicious looks and whispering to one another.

"One-eye got there okay," she reported. "You might want to get Spottedleaf to look at her, too."

Irritation flashed through Bluestar. "You don't tell me what to do, fish-breath," she spat. "I'm the leader here, and as leader, I think you should go back to where you came from."

Shock, then annoyance flashed over Leopardfur's face. "That was a great thank you," she mewed, turning to go. She paused and looked over her shoulder at Bluestar. "Don't expect me to help ThunderClan again. Next time, you carry them both." With that, the RiverClan deputy left.

"What happened?" Bluestar groaned inwardly at yet another voice; another cat seeking her attention and care. Redtail padded towards her.

"I'll hold and Clan meeting and let everyone know," she replied, not letting her irritation and weariness show through her voice. Redtail looked at her quizzically for a moment, then nodded. Bluestar called for a Clan meeting, and then let the warriors know what happened at the RiverClan camp.

"Will he be punished?" Willowpelt mewed.

"He will be punished according to his actions," Bluestar replied. "That is all." As the warriors dispersed, Bluestar padded into her den and flopped onto the bedding. She rested her head on her paws, closing her eyes. She'd gotten a bad feeling from Oakstar's hostility towards her. Should she be worried about that? Despite trying to comfort herself...

Something told her she should.

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a/n YES!!! I FINALLY FINISHED THIS CHAPTER!!!

Sorry for it taking SO LONG to get out... I had writer's block for a really, really long time, but now I know where to take this

story! It's gonna get reeeeaaaal interesting ;)

Thank you all so much for your eagerness to read this! It's helping me have motivation to write. As always, leave a vote and comment. If you guys have any suggestions on what you want to see in this story, just comment them down below, and if I use one in the chapters to come, I'll dedicate the chapter to you and give you credit!

Thank you for reading!! xx

Chapter 4 ~ The Welcoming

[image]

Oakstar watched as the ThunderClan patrol left the RiverClan camp. Questions swirled in his head, one after the other: why had Bluestar brought an *elder* to welcome him as leader? What had happened on the way to provoke Lionheart? More importantly - why had he acted so hostile towards her before they left? He didn't know where that colder side to him had come from - perhaps from her rejection all those moons ago? Her refusal to for them to switch Clans? He didn't know, and he didn't have time to find out. He had things to do.

Oakstar turned to Blackclaw, who had watched the ThunderClan patrol leave. The anger returned. "Blackclaw!"

The smoky black tom turned to his leader. Blood oozed from his injuries as he panted. Oakstar stalked towards him. "Why did you provoke Lionheart?"

Blackclaw looked up at Oakstar, eyes narrowed. A smirk played on the tom's features as he stood tall, shoving his face in front of Oakstar's. He could smell the warrior's fishy breath as he hissed, "All cats know ThunderClan's just a bunch of mange-pelts."

"That is *no* excuse!" The hot anger began to boil in his veins. "You're a pathetic excuse for a warrior," he snarled. Blackclaw didn't flinch. He watched his leader with a sly look in his eyes.

"No," the black tom mewed. He stood and came close to Oakstar; so close Oakstar could feel the warrior's hot breath on his ear. "You're a pathetic excuse for a leader. If you were a real leader, you would have broken up the fight as soon as it started. You would have told Bluestar to leave and only return to welcome you with a *proper patrol*." Blackclaw stepped back. "But did you do either of those things? No." Lifting his head, the warrior gave a final, stinging remark: "Crookedstar was wrong to pick his brother as deputy," he snarled.

Oakstar was finding it extremely hard to not leap across camp and attack the warrior himself. *Arrogant furball! Who does he think he is?* Oakstar stood tall, tail lashing. Just as he was about to give Blackclaw his punishment, another voice joined their conversation. "That is *no way* to speak to your leader, Blackclaw."

Oakstar and Blackclaw looked at Leopardfur, who stood beside Oakstar. Her eyes were ablaze with a fire Oakstar had only seen in battle. "If you were a real RiverClan warrior, you would be showing him just as much respect as you showed Crookedstar. But here you are, openly disrespecting him!" She stepped closer to the black warrior. "Do you question StarClan's choice in giving him nine lives?"

"They shouldn't have," Blackclaw mumbled.

Leopardfur snarled, "I think that if you had been deputy, StarClan would have refused to give you your lives. You don't deserve them."

"That's enough, Leopardfur," Oakstar interjected. Feeling slightly smug, he mewed, "I'm sure Blackclaw will learn his lesson when he returns to apprentice duties for a moon."

"A moon of apprentice duties for attacking an enemy warrior!?" Blackclaw spluttered. "This is outrageous! I was following the warrior code!"

"You were not, in fact," Leopardfur mewed. Blackclaw snarled at the deputy, baring his teeth.

"Enough, Blackclaw," Oakstar mewed. Tilting his head to the side, he teased, "Don't you have some elders waiting for their ticks to be removed?" *Mrrows* of amusement rose from some of the cats who were watching. Blackclaw's ears flattened in embarrassment. He didn't say anything more as he stomped away to the medicine den.

"I think we handled that well," Leopardfur commented as the warriors began to disperse and continue their duties.

"I think we did, too," Oakstar agreed. For a few moments, leader and deputy sat together, watching their Clan. The memory of

Bluestar standing with her patrol suddenly forced its way through his mind. Almost immediately, his paws began tingling. He felt the need to run.

So he did.

But before he left, he asked, "Leopardfur, could you watch over the camp while I'm gone? I just need to be away for a little bit after all that."

Leopardfur nodded. She murmured unusually compassionately, "Of course. Do what you need to do."

See Bluestar.

So Oakstar ran. He ran out of camp, through his territory, across the river that separated him and his Love; all the way to Fourtrees. When he stopped, he anxiously glanced around, looking for her. His instincts had told him to come here, but had hers?

A sudden crack of lightning jolted him. Looking up, he was surprised to see the once cloudless sky covered in dark, dark clouds. But when he looked down again, he saw he was on the edge of a cliff. Looking around, he realised he had no idea where he was, or what was happening. Suddenly, the distant sound of barking filled his eardrums, getting louder and louder, until they were *right behind him*. His vision blurred, and all of a sudden he was pelting through this forest that for some reason, he knew. He knew it like the back of his paw. Bewilderment and terror made his chest burn even more. *What's happening? Am I receiving a sign from StarClan?*

He tried to stop running, but he couldn't. It was like his body wasn't his anymore - it belonged to someone else. He felt dog teeth ripping into his leg. He screamed in pain; then terror as he was knocked off the cliff. He fell, faster and faster, until he hit the water.

No matter how hard he tried to swim, he couldn't. His body was tossed and turned by the waves. His vision blurred as he began to drown. He couldn't believe it. He, a *RiverClan cat*, was *drowning*. But as he concentrated harder, he realised - those were blue paws in front of him. His heart stopped. *Bluestar? My sweet? My Love is...*

going to drown? But before he could comprehend this, the water became calm. It became much less, and Oakstar realised he was i the river on his territory. Climbing up onto the bank, he shuddered, coughing up a mouthful of water. His whole body shook at what StarClan had revealed to him. His Love was going to drown and die.

But the horror wasn't over yet.

A rancid stench filled the air: the stench of blood. Looking ahead, Oakstar saw cats; cats battling. But they weren't just battling - they were *killing each other*. Water stained with blood surrounded the cats' paws, and cracks of thunder and lighting constantly filled the air and sky. Horror overcame him as the blood rushed around his paws, and began to rise. Oakstar immediately began thrashing. *No.* But just before it reached his muzzle, it stopped.

A clear voice spoke: "Darkness will rise, and the blinded storm will find a place among the stars."

And just like that, the vision was over. It was *over*. Oakstar was left reeling, terrified; trembling. He'd not only seen how his Love was going to die, but received a prophecy. *What does it all mean?*

He knew he could only talk to one cat about this... but he didn't know how she would handle it.

Chapter 5 ~ The Prophecy

Oakstar left Fourtrees, heading for the ThunderClan border. He didn't know how ThunderClan would react to a rival leader being so shaken, but he had to talk to her. He had to tell her what he knew.

He didn't have to wait long before a patrol approached him. "Oakstar," Lionheart greeted. "What can we do for you?"

Oakstar's voice came out like an embarrassing squeak. "I-" He stopped and swallowed before continuing, "I need to speak with Bluestar. It's urgent."

Lionheart grunted. "She went into her den once we returned from welcoming you and hasn't come out since. We can try and get her to talk to you, but if she doesn't want to, then you must leave immediately. Understand?"

Oakstar nodded and stepped over the border. The ThunderClan cats surrounded him as they began heading to their camp. For a brief moment, Oakstar wondered what his life would have been like if he had switched Clans like he had originally suggested to Bluestar. If he'd joined, and she became leader and made him deputy...But then, he shook the thought away. She'd been right - he would never have truly been able to be a leader. ThunderClan would have never been able to trust him because of his ties to RiverClan.

Before he knew it, the cats were at the entrance to the ThunderClan camp. As he pushed through the thorn tunnel, he winced at the thorns scraping against his sides. When he emerged, several of ThunderClan's cats stared at him. Lionheart walked forward a few paces and then stopped. "Wait here," he ordered before padding across to Highrock, waiting for a few moments, and then entering.

Oakstar settled himself, tucking his tail around his paws. *Please, StarClan. Let me talk to her.*

His heart leapt in his throat when Lionheart came out of the den. A

sigh of relief escaped his jaws as the golden-furred warrior gave him a nod. As much as he wanted to sprint to her, he kept his composure and padded calmly towards her den. As he came to the ferns, he thought he could see her hunched figure near the back of the den.

Her voice rang clearly. "Come in."

He moved hesitantly, unsure of how she would react to him coming to her camp so soon after being at his.

"What is it you want, Oakstar?" The blue-grey she-cat's voice was crisp; not a single hint of affection showed as she turned to face him before settling, tucking her tail around her paws. "After the spectacle in your camp, I would have assumed you would have stayed to watch over your Clanmates and deliver the appropriate punishment."

Two can play this game. "That I did," Oakstar replied, sitting across from her. "But I did not come here to discuss the welcoming."

Bluestar radiated hostility."Then why did you come?"

Oakstar hesitated.

"Well?"

Swallowing down his fear, he mewed, "StarClan gave me a vision... at least, I think they did."

"And why are you coming to me?" Her tone turned soft, as if she was explaining something to a small kit. "See, Oakstar, when you have a vision, you go to your *medicine cat.* Not a rival leader. It's protocol."

Oakstar bristled, frustrated. "Can you stop being such a pain in the tail and listen to me?!" Sighing, he added, "It's important... *please,* Bluestar?"

Bluestar stared him down through narrow eyes. She was clearly irritated, but mewed, "Fine." Just as Oakstar was about to speak, she continued, "On the condition that you leave immediately after."

Oakstar nodded. He was glad he'd gotten her to listen, even if it meant he'd had to beg. Somehow, he knew it wasn't right to tell her he'd seen how she was going to die - as painful as a burden that was to bear alone. So, he decided to only tell Bluestar about the blood and fighting.

Bluestar watched him coolly. Her expression gave nothing away as he began, "In my vision, I was climbing up the riverbank. I coughed up a mouthful of water. And then the stench of blood hit my nose. I looked up, and I saw cats battling up ahead of me. But, they weren't just battling - they were *killing* each other! Water stained with blood surrounded their paws, and cracks of thunder and lighting constantly filled the air and sky. Then the water and blood rushed around my paws and began to rise. But just before I went under, it stopped, and a clear voice spoke: *"Darkness will rise, and the blinded storm will find a place among the stars"*."

Bluestar's gaze narrowed. Her tail swished from side to side and her fur bushed out. Oakstar quickly got to his paws and backed up a couple of steps. "Bluestar?" he mewed.

Her mew was quiet. "There was absolutely *no reason* for you to come here and tell me this, Oakstar."

"But, it could concern our Clans-"

"*Or* it could just concern your own!" Bluestar's voice grew loud and hard. "Like I said to you before you told me your vision, you should have gone to your medicine cat, not to me." She moved closer to him and snarled, "You've made yourself and your Clan look weak." Stepping back, she continued, "Crookedstar was wrong about you. You're not a leader, you're a stupid, stupid cat who lets his emotions get in the way of leading his Clan. I can tell you now that you most certainly would *not* have thrived under my rule as deputy!"

Oakstar was shocked into silence. Then, he shook with anger, and he straightened up; bushing out his fur. The ThunderClan leader met his gaze, but he saw her flinch. Oakstar moved forward, letting his anger take control. He growled, "You know very well that Crookedstar was a strong leader. He kept our secret till the very end. If it weren't for Snowfur, you would have never won against

him."

Bluestar's eyes widened, and she bristled all the more. Oakstar stepped back. "Besides," he continued, "I wouldn't want to serve under an irrational, psychotic leader who does things like take kits out of a camp in the middle of a blizzard in leaf-bare, or force elders out of their rightful rest to accompany them on a patrol." He looked at her for one more moment; watched as her eyes widened and her fur laid flat and her mouth parted, then shook his head and snarled, "I'm done here," and left the den.

Chapter 6 ~ Remembering

[image]

Bluestar didn't regret what she'd said to Oakstar - he needed to understand that just because he was a leader now, it didn't mean he could just pelt to ThunderClan to talk to her whenever he felt like it. She was glad she'd reprimanded him - if they met too often, their Clanmates might suspect something, and all those moons of keeping apart would have gone to waste.

'He kept our secret till the very end.'

Well, Oakstar, that secret might be out now.

Bluestar padded out of her den to sit atop Highrock and watch her Clan. She swallowed as she thought of Oakstar. She had given him and their kits up to become leader of ThunderClan. Was she now losing sight of that? *StarClan didn't make me leader because of how great a warrior I was*, she reminded herself. *StarClan made me leader because they knew I would be able to save ThunderClan from Thistleclaw's destruction. And I have*.

Looking back down into the clearing, she watched as the cats of ThunderClan mingled together as they went about their day: warriors filling the fresh-kill pile with mice and squirrels, apprentices practicing fighting moves in the clearing, elders mewing about the old days. She felt her chest puff with pride as a purr rumbled through it. ThunderClan was doing well — all because of her.

She looked up at the sky. If it were night, she could have been able to see StarClan's warriors shining above; forever watching over the four Clans living below. "Thank you, StarClan," she breathed. "Thank you for giving me leadership over ThunderClan." She stared at the sky for a few more heartbeats before looking back at the camp walls. Suddenly, she was surrounded by an achingly familiar scent: "Snowfur," Bluestar whispered. Her sister's voice weaved around her, echoing in her ears: "With this life, I give you pride, so

that you may know your own worth and the worth of your Clan... You were chosen long ago, and StarClan has never regretted its choice." Bluestar closed her eyes, a mixture of pain and love filling her chest. Clearer, Snowfur whispered to her, "Don't forget who you are."

"Leader of ThunderClan," Bluestar breathed back.

She felt Snowfur's approval, and her purring rumbled through Bluestar's entire body. "I am leader of ThunderClan," Bluestar breathed to herself. Louder, she repeated, "I am leader of ThunderClan." She heard Snowfur's voice again: "I give you pride..." "I am leader of ThunderClan," Bluestar mewed again.
"Pride," Snowfur whispered. Bluestar could feel more of her warrior ancestors gathering around her; their pride of their Clan filling her like rain fills a river. The fire she had had within her all of her life begin to burn brighter and fiercer than ever before. The battle cries of long-lost ThunderClan warriors resounded in her eardrums as they fought for their territory. For each other.

Bluestar threw her head back and yowled, "I am leader of ThunderClan!" She could feel and hear the StarClan warriors' yowls of approval all around her.

"Indeed you are, Bluestar."

The StarClan warriors' presence vanished. She whipped her head to the left to see Redtail staring at her in amusement. Bluestar shook herself, embarrassed and annoyed at the interruption. Looking down, she could see several cats looking up at her, confused. Redtail tilted his head. "Did you forget?"

You have no idea.

Bluestar gave him a look before padding to stand at the edge of Highrock. "Let all cats old enough to catch their own prey join beneath Highrock for a Clan meeting!"

The cats already in the clearing moved quickly. Lionheart and Tigerclaw emerged from the warriors' den and settled themselves near Whitestorm. Mousefur and Runningwind sat close together,

and Willowpelt quickly joined them. The elders were all carefully sat outside the elder's den, and Spottedleaf was sat in the shade of the medicine cat's den. Redtail moved to sit beneath Highrock.

Bluestar raised her head as she spoke. "I would like to lead a patrol that covers the ground of our borders across all territories." Murmurs of dissent rose from the warriors.
"Bluestar..." Tigerclaw's smooth voice rose above the other cats'. "Not to overstep my boundaries, but I would like to say there is a reason we send out several patrols to our borders with the other Clans. If one patrol moved across the entire forest, those cats would grow tired, and the other warriors would sit and do nothing." He paused. "That is not how a Clan runs. Did Sunstar teach you nothing?" Murmurs of agreement and *mrrows* of laughter rose from some of the warriors. Bluestar felt her hackles rise. *How dare he challenge me so openly!*

"Tigerclaw," Bluestar began. "There is a reason that I am doing this. A reason you could not possibly understand." She leapt down from Highrock, stalking towards the broad-shouldered tabby. He drew himself up to his full height as she stopped in front of him. "Sunstar taught me many things, but challenging a leader's word without any real reason was not one of them." She stared into his amber eyes. "You, Lionheart and Whitestorm will accompany me on this patrol. Do you understand me?"

Tigerclaw stared back, distaste in his features. After a few heartbeats, he sighed, dipped his head, and grumbled, "Yes, Bluestar."

Bluestar straightened up. "Good." Turning to Redtail, she continued, "I trust you will organise the other patrols?"

He nodded, and beckoned the other warriors forward with his tail. Lionheart and Whitestorm joined Bluestar and Tigerclaw. Bluestar could feel that fire burning in her chest again. *All the Clans will see just how strong ThunderClan can be.* Lifting her head, she mewed, "Let's go." With that, the four cats moved towards the camp entrance.

A/N: it has been so long since i last updated!!! and i am so, so

sorry for that. but now, i've finally gotten over my writer's block, and there are definitely more chapters of this story coming! thank you all for waiting for so long (sorry again for that 😬😬), & i hope you enjoy this chapter of *what could have been*!!